



Moderator Package

Student Focus Groups

This document is intended to assist Schools in facilitating student focus groups in relation to our Student Engagement Division measure. Additional school-specific questions may be added to the common questions that all engagement schools will ask within this package.



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Student Focus Group

Moderator Guide

I. INTRODUCTION: (3 min)

Purpose: The moderator greets the participants and explains the objectives of focus group and reviews the rules.

Instructions: ***wording will need to be adjusted according to grade level. Use your judgement with keeping intention of each question***

Hello. My name is _____ I am going to run our discussion today and _____ will be our note taker. My job is to make sure that we cover our questions and to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to be involved. Our purpose today is to find out what you, as students, think about your interest in school, and what engages you as a learner (ensure students understand what engagement, in general means). There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions. The purpose is to find out what your personal opinions are, and everyone's opinion is equally important to us. **We will try to keep our conversation within 30 minutes.**

Before we get started, here are some ground rules and points of information: [may want to post this and refer to it]

1. Please talk one at a time.
2. Avoid side conversations with neighbors
3. We need to hear from everyone in the course of the discussion, but you don't have to answer every question.
4. Feel free to respond directly to someone who has made a point. You don't have to address your comments to me. Would like us to have a group conversation.
5. Say what is true for you. Don't let the group decide your opinion for you.
6. Respect for opinions: You may find that you disagree with an opinion voiced here by another person. That is okay, and I hope you will say so when that happens in a respectful and polite way. You also may change your mind in the middle of our discussion, perhaps as a result of something that someone else says, and again I hope you will say so, if and when that happens.
7. Don't hesitate to stop us as we are writing if what we have written does not accurately reflect your comments.
8. This discussion is completely anonymous and confidential. **We do not use names of students, teachers or parents in discussions** and there will be no record of what you say with your name on it. We are not going to quote anyone specifically using her/his name. ***You were all randomly selected to participate in this session, and we appreciate that you have taken time out of your lives to come today.***

Directly quoted from : Abt Associates. (2004). *Principal focus group questions: Moderator guide*. Retrieved February 3, 2010, from <http://www.abt.sliidea.org/dci/principals%20guide.pdf>

II. Focus Group Questions (see Logistics section below for more detailed information)

Our 4 divisional questions:

1. Socio-Emotional Engagement Question:

- a. Describe the relationships you have at school with:
 - i. Other students?
 - ii. Friends?
 - iii. Adults? (not solely classroom teacher- may be custodian, school administration assistant, principal, parent volunteers, educational assistant...)

2. Socio-Emotional, Institutional and/or Intellectual Engagement aspects may surface:

- a. Are there things that you like or dislike about school?
 - i. Can you give specific examples? (may include other clarifying questions based on conversations)

3. Intellectual Engagement Question:

- a. How often during the school day do you feel challenged and excited about your learning?
 - i. When you think of those times:
 - 1. What were you doing?
 - 2. What were other students doing?
 - 3. What was your teacher doing? (may include other clarifying questions based on conversations)

4. Institutional and/or Intellectual Engagement aspects may surface:

- a. What motivates you to work hard or do your best in school?

Note: In addition of the 4 questions above, as a school you have the option to add more questions (1-2 maximum recommended) that may more specifically address the uniqueness of your school project goals in relation to any of the three types of student engagement (Socio-Emotional, Institutional, or Intellectual)

5. Optional Additional Question 1:

6. Optional Additional Question 2:

III. Wrap-Up/Inform Next Steps

- a. **Another Opportunity to Respond:** We've covered a lot of ground in our time together. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about in relation your level of engagement at school?
- b. **Inform students of next steps:**
 - i. The items you have shared today will be used to guide teacher planning, and development of strategies to increase levels of student engagement. This is a project we will be working on for the next three years, and your input is very important to our work.
 - ii. We will touch base with you again towards the end of this school year to see how your experiences may have changed or what your thoughts are at that time, which will influence our next steps for the following school year.
 - iii. Each year we will conduct this type of focus group at the beginning of the year and the end of year and at our school, *we may also collect other data to help us improve through _____ (to be filled in by individual school depending on other measures used) * As applicable**
- c. Thank you for your participation as your voice is important as we plan our next steps.

Logistics: Student Focus Groups

Think About:	Notes to Self:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Selection of students – ideal group size is around 5-6 students: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Random selection <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Balance males/females ii. Balance grades iii. Balance subject areas?? (high school/middle) iv. Abilities/behaviours b. Running of 1 or more focus groups depending on school configuration <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. K-4; 5-9; 10-12 c. Will your LST decide to follow the same group of students for the three year? Or change students annually? 	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. When is the most appropriate time for students to do this? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Will need to communicate with teachers about student absences 	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Will you provide snacks? Lunch? 	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. How will you thank the students? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Thank you cards b. Gift Certificates c. Other 	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. How will you inform parents of process? (Note: Parent consent forms included within this document on pages 10-12) 	

Focus Group Process:

Ideal student group size is up to 6 people.

Up to 6 people:

1. Sit at tables so participants can see each other (ideally).
2. Several options exist, depending on your comfort level with the group:
 - a. **Option A – Large group discussion with note taking**
 - i. Work as a large group with **one facilitator** and one **note taker**.
 - ii. Work through the 4 (or more) engagement questions as a large group discussion
 - iii. Note taker should record on chart paper or SMART board or on laptop that is attached to a projector. **Notes need to be seen by the group.**

b. Option B – Post-it-Note Format

- i. Facilitator:
 1. Question 1:
 - a. Have participants write down ideas to questions on post-it-notes first. One idea per post-it-note related to the topic.
 - b. Each member talks by putting post-it-note in the centre of the table, going around the groups so everyone has a voice. Continue until all post it notes are exhausted.
 - c. Note taker is recording ideas on chart paper as discussion continues. Note taker may start to notice themes and can record or make headings according to themes on chart paper/SMART board/computer with projector
 - d. At the end of the first question, facilitators or note taker should review notes on chart paper, ask if there are any additions.
 2. Question 2: Repeat process



c. Option C – Personal Record Sheets and Chart paper

- i. Question 1:
 - a. Facilitator asks participants to write down initial thoughts on the first topic on a sheet of paper provided to each participant. ***These sheets can be collected by the table facilitator once the conversation has been exhausted.***
 - b. Each member takes a turn sharing ideas from their sheet going around the group so everyone has a voice. Continue until all ideas are exhausted. Participants may continue to write down ideas on their individual sheets.
 - c. Table facilitator either takes notes on chart paper or assigns one of the group members to take notes. Note taker should record on chart paper



or SMART Board or on laptop that is attached to a projector. Notes need to be seen by the group.

- d. Facilitator will need to make sure there is participation from all members.
 - e. Upon completion of the first question, go over what has been written, ask if there is anything else that they would like to add.
- ii. Go on to second question and repeat process.
3. You may choose to use a tape recorder. Analyzing data from the tape recorder requires you to either analyze the data as you re-listen to the tape OR have the tape transcribed. **If you choose to use a tape recorder, you should still have someone actively taking notes.**

Materials:

- Snacks
- Post-it-notes
- Pencils/pens
- Individual participant sheets with focus group questions
- Chart paper
- Markers
- SMART Board or laptop and projector(s) for recording answers– may want to use for small groups



Tips on Managing the Focus Group Session

1. Once you present a question to the group, it is important to step back and allow the discussion to progress with only a minimal amount of interruption on your part.
2. Do not steer the conversation to answers you want to hear 😊
3. Allow periods of silence. Silence is uncomfortable...but silence is also golden...
4. Avoid asking questions that seem to suggest a correct answer.
5. Try not to let strong personalities dominate the discussion.
6. Encourage input by those who are less inclined to speak out on the questions being discussed.
7. Make every effort to practice good listening skills.

Directly quoted from: Israel, G., & Galindo-Gonzalez, S. (2008). *Using focus group interviews for planning or evaluating extension programs*. University of Florida. Retrieved February 19, 2010, from <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/PD/PD03600.pdf>

Analyzing Focus Group Data



- Analysis is used to identify overarching themes related to the questions that were discussed and the range of perspectives expressed by the participants.
- Common considerations in analyzing focus group data are:
 - Words: identify commonly used words; cluster similar concepts together; arrange responses on a continuum or in categories. Also consider nonverbal communication related to the words, such as body language and the intensity expressed by the speed, volume, or pitch of speech.
 - Patterns: Do participants change or reverse statement after hearing from each other? What comments were offered by more than one participant? What themes were supported or rejected by more than one participant? What issues or questions were especially easy or difficult for the group to resolve?
 - Specificity of Responses: Give more weight to responses that are specific and based on experiences than those that are vague and impersonal. Give more weight to responses in the first person rather than hypothetical third person.
- Use a several colored highlighters or markers to color code themes in the data.

Directly quoted from: Tobacco Control Evaluation Center. (n.d.). *Tips & tools #4: Focus Group Interviews*. Retrieved February 19, 2010, from <http://ucce.ucdavis.edu/files/filelibrary/5715/27616.pdf>



Reporting Focus Group Data

- Information about the number of people who participated in the focus group and the number of focus groups conducted should be included.
- **Key themes in the data should be presented in relation to each of our 4 divisional questions:**
 1. **Describe the relationships you have at school.** (Socio-Emotional Engagement)
 2. **Are there things that you like or dislike about school?** (Socio-Emotional, Institutional, &/or Intellectual Engagement)
 3. **How often during the school day do you feel challenged and excited about your learning?** (Intellectual Engagement)
 4. **What motivates you to work hard or do your best in school?** (Institutional &/or Intellectual engagement)
- Direct quotes can be used to illustrate the major ideas or perspectives that were identified in the focus group analysis.
- It is usually not appropriate to report the information in terms of the percentage of participants who gave one answer or another. **The purpose of the focus is to understand the range of perspectives and foster a conversation on the topic.**
- See Focus Group Division Measure Overview for how and when to submit focus group data on next page

References:

- Abt Associates. (2004). *Principal focus group questions: Moderator guide*. Retrieved February 3, 2010, from <http://www.abt.sliidea.org/dci/principals%20guide.pdf>
- Berg, B. (2004). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.
- FGD. (2009). Focus group moderator's guide: national survey of parents in SEE Countries. Retrieved February 3, 2010, from http://www.google.com/search?q=teacher+focus+group+moderator+guide&rls=com.microsoft:en-us&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&startIndex=&startPage=1&rlz=1I7SKPB_en
- Krueger, R. (n.d.). *Focus group interviewing*. Retrieved February 2, 2010, from <http://www.tc.umn.edu/~rkrueger/focus.html>
- Lee, T. (1999). *Using qualitative methods in organizational research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

AISI 5 Student Engagement Measure

*Our goal with this student engagement measure is to be as streamlined as possible. By reporting on this measure, the need for the traditional Annual General Reports (APAR's) that each school has done in the past will be eliminated. While we ask all schools who have AISI goals directly aligned with student engagement to conduct this student focus group divisional measure, your school **may decide** to collect other measure(s) in addition that provides feedback along the way as strategies are created and implemented.*

At the start of the year:

1. **Determine how you will select students for divisional focus group questions:**
 - a. Each focus group should have 4-6 students or varying demographics- [see focus group document for clarifying details](#)
 - b. K-12 school- one focus group at each "level"- elementary, middle and high school?
 - c. How many focus groups will you have? Mixture of grades in each focus group?
 - d. Will you follow the same group of students over the 3 years or will you decide to use different students each year for the 2 focus group divisional measure?
 - e. Note: students chosen for focus group at the start of year will be the same students for the end of the year focus groups
2. **Conduct your focus group(s) during the month of November:**
 - a. Follow process and use questions as outlined in the **focus group process document**
 - b. Record all student responses manually or electronically during your focus group- direct words and quotes of students is essential (rather than our interpretations), but not a word for word of every item expressed
3. **Identify emerging themes for each focus group questions:**
 - a. Look at the individual responses to see emerging themes, surprising results and/or areas to work towards.
 - b. Keep track of varying student quotes to back up themes inferred
 - c. These themes should provide a useful snap-shot for where your school might develop strategies to address key identified issues over the course of this school year.
4. **Submit emergent themes & key student quotes for each of the research questions- by Dec. 15th**
 - a. [Via this electronic online form](#)
 - i. In each specific question section include the **various themes that emerged** from focus group conversations as well as **specific student quotes** as evidence of the themes
5. **Overall divisional themes will be compiled and shared back to schools before the Christmas break**

At the end of the year:

1. Identical process as outlined above with focus groups conducted and themes identified within the **Month of May**
2. Submitted Electronically by **May 31st**. (Electronic form will be sent out for this in the Spring)
3. Divisional themes shared back to schools by **June 15th**.

Example Student Engagement Tools That Could Be Employed in Addition to District Focus Group Measure

Elementary Middle and High School			
	Product	Observation	Conversation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quantitative measure at school/classroom in relation to increase in student grades, attendance- Power School Qualitative measure in relation to evidence of growth in student learning of knowledge and understanding, skills & processes and values and attitudes within curricular outcomes Student inventories of what types of extra-curricular (teams, clubs, volunteering activities) they would like to be involved in at school Student inventories/Learner profiles created to help guide teacher for planning of curricular learning activities to meet needs of learners (including collaborative, authentic learning projects) Use of school generated survey data with students around the three types of engagement. Use of survey data with staff around strategies for encouraging intellectual engagement Qualitative measure in relation to evidence of school endeavors aimed at social-emotional connections. Qualitative and quantitative measures around identified at-risk students and their engagement at all three types of engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student work artifacts Classroom/student observations Reflective evidence-based teaching rubrics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> with parents with students with teachers
		Note: Steering Committee will compile/create documents that can assist with these strategies	

Appendix A

Sample Parent Letter and Letter of Consent



Parental Informed Consent Form Chinook's Edge School Division No. 73 Focus Group Participation

TITLE OF PROJECT: Alberta Initiative for School Improvement

PERSONS IN CHARGE:

AISI team

Name

Address

Phone number

The feedback we are requesting from your child is part of our school's Alberta Initiative for School Improvement project. This study focuses on student engagement in relation to their learning experiences at school.

If you agree to allow your child to provide us with feedback, he/she will be asked to participate in a focus group on ***{insert date and time here}*** with other students in which they will be asked to talk about their perceived level of engagement in school and their learning. The specific questions have been attached to this letter.

We do not anticipate any risks from participating in this study (that is, not beyond those encountered in the course of everyday life). You should remember that during each of the discussions your child does not have to answer any question(s) that he/she does not wish to answer. They will be free to leave the group at any time. Further, you or your child may ask questions about our focus group procedures at any time and these questions will be answered.

The information your child gives us is confidential. To protect your child's identity, they will not be identified personally in any way. A final report will be compiled based on the information gathered during the focus group, however, no personally identifying information will be disclosed.

Informed Consent
(Parent or Guardian)

This is to certify that I, _____ , hereby agree to allow my
(Parent or Guardian's Name)

child _____ to volunteer in the Alberta Initiative for School
Improvement focus group.

I understand the information given to me. The investigation and my child's part in it have been fully explained to me and I have received answers to any questions I may have had about the focus group. I understand and agree to the conditions of the focus group as described.

I understand that my child will be part of a group process where he/she will be asked to share opinions with other students.

I understand that my child is free to decline to answer specific questions or items in the focus group.

I understand that any data or answers to questions will remain confidential.

I further understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and terminate my child's participation in this focus group.

Date

Parent's (or Guardian's) Signature



Informed Consent
Student

I, _____, agree to be part of a study about student
(Student's Name)

engagement. This focus group is being done as part of our school's Alberta Initiative for School Improvement project.

I understand that I will be asked to take part in a focus group and will be asked questions about student engagement (how you learn best), student assessment, and student use of technology. I do not have to answer any questions I don't want to answer, and I can leave the group at any time if I want to.

Date

Student's Signature



Student Focus Group Recording Sheet

Date of Focus Group:

Number of Students:

Grade Level of Students:

1. Describe the relationships you have at school with (*Socio-Emotional Engagement Question*):
 - a. Other students?
 - b. Friends?
 - c. Adult(s)? (not solely classroom teacher- may be custodian, school administration assistant, principal, parent volunteers, educational assistant...)
2. Are there things that you like about school (*Socio-Emotional, Institutional and/or Intellectual Engagement Question*):
 - a. Can you give specific examples? (may include other clarifying questions based on conversations)

3. How often during the school day do you feel challenged and excited about your learning (*Intellectual Engagement Question*)?

a. When you think of those times:

i. What were you doing?

ii. What were other students doing?

iii. What was your teacher doing? (may include other clarifying questions based on conversations)

4. What motivates you to work hard or do your best in school (Institutional and/or Intellectual Engagement Question)?

Appendix B

Sample Focus Group form for participants

as a guided sheet that they can fill out as students are speaking/as they are reflecting

<p>1. Describe the relationships you have at school with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Other students? b. Friends? c. Adult(s)? (not solely classroom teacher- may be custodian, school administration assistant, principal, parent volunteers, educational assistant...) 	<p>Recorded student words/responses:</p>
<p>2. Are there things that you like about school?</p> <p>a. Can you give specific examples? (may include other clarifying questions based on conversations)</p>	
<p>3. How often during the school day do you feel challenged and excited about your learning?</p> <p>When you think of those times:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) What were you doing? b) What were other students doing? c) What was your teacher doing? (may include other clarifying questions based on conversations) 	
<p>4. What motivates you to work hard or do your best in school?</p>	

Appendix C

Notes for Focus Group Moderator AFTER Focus Group

Students

Topic	What worked?	What should we change for next time?
Initial contact process		
Room <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Space- Arrangement- Location- other		
Questions <ul style="list-style-type: none">- process of asking- types of questions-		
Thank you <ul style="list-style-type: none">- What we did-		
Other		